(U//FOUO) Write Right: Give the 'Key Points' Style a Try

FROM: ███████████
of the Reporting Board (S12A)
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(U//FOUO) In this world of information overload, when you have too much to do and too little time to do it,

- How can I get my reader's attention?
- What can I do to make my reports easier to understand?
- How can I bring the critical points up front?

(U//FOUO) This month's column is a shameless plagiarism of previous writings and discussions of an excellent reporting technique: Key Points. Symbols, indented subparagraphs and white space (skipping a line between the bullets) add to the product's readability and grab the reader's attention.

(C) You may be familiar with this style from reports issued by GCHQ , which began experimenting with key points in 1996. In an attempt to expand their readership to a higher-level customer set, especially their London policy-makers, GCHQ's (then) M Group began to replace their traditional summary paragraphs with a "Key Points" section. Customer feedback was positive and constructive, and now the style is common in a majority of GCHQ reports.

(C) Though the number of key points varies from one to many, the purpose is to highlight the important facts. Formatting instructions are found in USSID CR1400 (formerly USSID 300) in Section 5.19, Bullets and Sub-Bullets.

(S//SI) Tips for using key points/bullets:

- Include an introductory sentence or two before listing the summary's key points. (This differs from GCHQ's approach where the summary consists of the list of key points.) The introductory information could include general attribution and a description of an event, such as: "Following an early January meeting between Czech and French Foreign Ministers, ..."

- Anything in SIGINT that breaks naturally into a list is an ideal candidate report for key points/bullets. Possibilities include:
    - Talking Points
    - Itineraries and Travel Plans
    - Results of meetings or discussions
    - Proposals or demands

- Once the key points or bullets are outlined in the summary, carry them down into the text as subheadings. This way, you've told the reader what the highlights are, now follow through and organize your details in a similar manner.

- Don't force key points or bullets in the Summary. Let the product content or length dictate whether or not you use key points.

- Don't hesitate to use bullets as an alternative to full text paragraphs within the details (the body of the report).

(U) Give it a try and ask your customers what they think!

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